

PEOPLE & THINGS

I HAD always taken for granted that the Victoria Cross took precedence after the holder's name over all other initials, but I now learn that I was until recently technically wrong, for the V.C. is a decoration and not a grade in chivalry and strictly speaking all decorations rank after knightly honours.

The point was referred to the Queen, and I am glad to say that Her Majesty, clarifying a decision by her grandfather, King George V, has firmly decreed that wherever such initials are used, both the V.C. and the G.C.—the supreme awards for military and civil valour—shall be placed before everything else, including even the Garter, the greatest Order of chivalry in the world.

Honour from Merthyr

NO one who was present when Lord Kemsley received the freedom of the borough of Merthyr Tydfil last Thursday could have failed to be moved by the simple but meaningful ceremony. This town in the Welsh hills, a town which suffered so grievously in the depression but is now cheerful and prosperous with its new industries, was welcoming with honour a son of whom it was obviously and sincerely proud; and he, in turn, was as obviously and sincerely proud of being a son of Merthyr.

As the Mayor, Councillor Morgan Osborne, reminded us, the late Alderman J. M. Berry had been a member of the first council of the borough after it received its charter half a century ago. He had been one of those who worked to get for Merthyr the power to do that which it was now happily doing for the youngest of his three sons, who had all become Peers of the Realm—itsself surely a unique story. The eldest, the late Lord Buckland, had been made a freeman in 1923; and it was a sad thought for everyone that the first Lord Camrose had died before the honour which had been intended for him could be bestowed.

Addressing the younger people of his audience—and there were many—at the end of his speech, Lord Kemsley said he hoped he was looking upon a future freeman of Merthyr—"perhaps already that ambition is stirring in some of your young breasts." And, indeed, with such an inspiration, it would be strange if it were not so. Many of us who are not from Merthyr Tydfil will be looking in future years for the realisation of that hope.

Strong-i'-th'-arm

THE feat of tearing the London telephone directory in half, which was the strong man's parlour-trick before the war, has gone out of fashion with the introduction of more expensive and slimmer volumes.

In the good old days the Berlin telephone directory, then as thick as our present A to D, E to K and

By ATTICUS

L to R combined, and bound in stiff covers, represented the blue riband among gently nurtured strong men. I only once saw it rent in twain, and afterwards, for good measure, the reader took a cartwheel five-mark piece and bent it between his thumb and the first and second fingers of his right hand.

The Sea Devil

THE man who, with the perspiration pouring down his handsome face, did these things was Count Felix von Luckner, the famous skipper of the German raider Sea Devil, which sank 64,000 tons of Allied shipping in the 1914-18 war. His chivalry in combat was legendary, and, because of his character and principles, he took no part in the last war and instead suffered continual persecution at the hands of the Nazis.

Now, at the age of sixty-four, he lives in a motorised land-cruiser with a window in the roof through which he can see the stars before he falls asleep, and, with his Swedish wife, he has just reached Majorca on his way round the world on a 'one-man peace campaign.

Quite a man.



[Marsh of Ottawa

Jean Cocteau

The Face of Talent

M. JEAN COCTEAU has been painting all his life in secret, and it was not until last week that he held his first exhibition in Rome, which he chose "because I wanted the Eternal City for my baptism as a painter."

Although most of the hundred works exhibited are oils and pastels, including portrait sketches of Picasso and Modigliani, the most striking is "Judith and Holofernes," a tapestry on wool executed for him by the Ateliers d'Aubusson.

Cocteau comments on this latest of his many careers: "It is an important step for the poet to express himself through the painter's language, which is the only language that does not disintegrate on crossing the wall which separates peoples."

This Old House

THE cottage on Duck Island in St. James's Park has always seemed to me the ideal London residence for a resourceful bachelor.

Traditionally the perquisite of the Park's Birdkeeper (and, in fact, an indispensable adjunct to his modest salary) it has not been lived in since 1952, and I was sorry to learn from the Ministry of Works that this romantic landmark has deteriorated beyond repair and is shortly to be pulled down.

Built in 1840 by the Ornithological Society, which then owned and maintained the ornamental birds on the lake, the diminutive cottage has been the property of the Office, or Ministry, of Works since 1869, and I am glad to say that the new Minister, Mr. Nigel Birch, who is a man of taste as well as of action, is taking an immediate and personal interest in the plans for building a new one.

A Very English Man

ONCE at a week-end party, in one of England's great houses, a distinguished foreigner complained to me that he had never yet met an Englishman. "In the end," he said, "they all turn out to be Scots or Irish or Welsh. Please show me one."

I showed him Rupert Beckett, who was in the same party, and, whether or not I was genealogically correct, the foreigner watched him closely for a while and then said thoughtfully: "Yes, I see."

For Rupert Beckett, who died last week at the age of eighty-four, was, in his gruff, kindly voice, his keen but humorous eyes, the courage and sanity of his strongly Conservative outlook, his sharp nose for a fool or a rogue, and in his gentle manners, Everyman's portrait of "An Englishman."

There are some minor but very English institutions where he was known all through this century, and which will perhaps most miss his staunch and ironically cheerful presence—White's, which he joined in 1889 and of which he held the longest unbroken membership, The Turf, of which he was the second oldest member, and the Royal Yacht Squadron, of which he was the third oldest member.

And one major part of England—the whole county of Yorkshire.

Mr. Eliot's Plans

MR. T. S. ELIOT, who has completely recovered from his recent illness, flies to Hamburg on Wednesday for a forty-eight-hour visit during which he will receive the Hanseatic Goethe Prize—a medal and 10,000 marks—and will speak on "Goethe as the Sage." A German text of his address—an unusual Eliot "first edition"—will be published later. He will return with the medal but not with the money prize, which he has handed over for the relief of last year's Bavarian flood victims.

Two days after his return to London he will be flying to New York to fulfil a number of reading engagements. Although he is a considerable dollar-earner, Mr. Eliot meticulously pays his way on his annual visit to his family and friends in the U.S.A. by giving readings from his poems. This time he will be visiting New York, Cambridge and Washington, where he will meet his old mentor, Ezra Pound—"il miglior fabbro," as he described him in the dedication to "The Waste Land" over thirty years ago.

In the Blood

THE headmastership of Gresham's, that ancient school with a distinctive modern tradition, goes to one of the outstanding younger schoolmasters of the time, Mr. L. Bruce Lockhart. From Cargillfield, the famous Scottish preparatory school, of which his father was headmaster, he took a scholarship to Sedburgh; it was to his dismay that his father followed him there as head. His career at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he was an open scholar and choral exhibitor and took a First in Modern Languages, was interrupted by five years in the Household Cavalry. Like his father, he played Rugger for Cambridge and for Scotland; like his father, he now reaches the highest ranks of schoolmastering, adding another laurel to a great family record adorned also by his uncles Sir R. Bruce Lockhart and General Sir Rob Lockhart.

Though I cannot say that it had any influence on the result, the Governors took the precaution of interviewing the wives of the short-listed candidates as well as the applicants themselves. Mrs. Bruce Lockhart's first comment on hearing of her husband's success: "Just as well, as we spent 14 guineas on my hat."

The President's Hat

ACCORDING to Bennett Cerf, the American literary columnist, Mr. Abraham Lincoln once bought a seat for a theatre in Springfield, Massachusetts, and arrived just as the gas-lights were dimmed. His eyes riveted on the stage, he placed his silk hat on the seat next to him, open end up. A stout lady, entering the line of stalls from the other end, sank into the empty seat. There was a loud crunch, and she rose up with a cry of dismay.

Mr. Lincoln ruefully rescued the remains of his hat. "Madam," he said plaintively, "I could have told you my hat wouldn't fit you before you tried it on."